



## SYNOPSIS.

Eleanora de Toscana was singing in Paris, which, perhaps, accounted for Edward Courtlandt's appearance there. Multimillionaire, he wandered about where fancy dictated. He might be in Paris one day and Kamchatka the next. Following the opera he goes to a cafe and is accosted by a pretty young woman. She gave him the address of Flora Desimone, vocal rival of Toscana, and Flora gives him the address of Eleanora, whom he is determined to see. Courtlandt enters Eleanora's apartments. She orders him out and shoots at him. The next day Paris is shocked by the mysterious disappearance of the prima donna. Realizing that he may be suspected of the abduction of Eleanora Courtlandt arranges for an alibi. Eleanora reappears and accuses Courtlandt of having abducted her. His alibi is satisfactory to the police and the charge is dismissed. Eleanora flees to Lake Como to rest after the shock. She is followed by a number of her admirers, among them the prince who really procured her abduction. Courtlandt also goes to Como and there meets Jimmie Harrigan, retired prizefighter and father of Eleanora, whose real name is Nora Harrigan. Harrigan takes Courtlandt into his favor at once. He introduces Courtlandt to his daughter, but the latter gives no sign of ever having met him before. She studiously avoids him. Nora's confessor scents a mystery involving Nora and Courtlandt. He takes a strong fancy to the young man.

## CHAPTER IX—Continued.

"I was asleep when the pistol went off. Oh, you must believe that it was purely accidental! She was in a terrible state until morning. What if she had killed you, what if she had killed you! She seemed to harp upon that phrase."

Courtlandt turned a sober face toward her. She might be sincere, and then again she might be playing the first game over again, in a different guise. "It would have been embarrassing if the bullet had found its mark." He met her eyes squarely, and she saw that his were totally free from surprise or agitation or interest. "Will you be here long?"

"It depends."

"Upon Nora?" persistently.

"The weather."

"You are hopeless."

"No; on the contrary, I am the most optimistic man in the world."

She looked into this reply very carefully. If he had hopes of winning Nora Harrigan, optimistic he certainly must be. Perhaps it was not optimism. Rather might it not be a purpose made of steel, bendable but not breakable, reinforced by a knowledge of conditions which she would have given worlds to learn?

"Is she not beautiful?"

"I am not a poet."

"Wait a moment," her eyes widening. "I believe you know who did commit that outrage."

For the first time he frowned.

"Very well; I promise not to ask any more questions."

"That would be very agreeable to me." Then, as if he realized the rudeness of his reply, he added: "Before I leave I will tell you all you wish to know, upon one condition."

"Tell it!"

"You will say nothing to any one, you will question neither Miss Harri-

gan nor myself, nor permit yourself to be questioned."

"I agree."

"And now, will you not take me over to your friends?"

"Over there?" aghast.

"Why, yes. We can sit upon the grass. They seem to be having a good time."

What a man! Take him over, into the enemy's camp? Nothing would be more agreeable to her. Who would be the stronger, Nora or this provoking man?

So they crossed over and joined the group. The padre smiled. It was a situation such as he loved to study: a strong man and a strong woman, at war. But nothing happened; not a ripple anywhere to disclose the agitation beneath. The man laughed and the woman laughed, but they spoke not to each other, nor looked once into each other's eyes.

The sun was dropping toward the western tops. The guests were leaving by twos and threes. The colonel had prevailed upon his dinner guests not to bother about going back to the village to dress, but to dine in the clothes they wore. Finally, none remained but Harrigan, Abbott, the Barone, the padre and Courtlandt. And they talked noisily and agreeably concerning man affairs until Rao gravely announced that dinner was served.

It was only then, during the lull which followed, that light was shed upon the puzzle which had been subconsciously stirring Harrigan's mind: Nora had not once spoken to the son of his old friend.

## CHAPTER X.

## Everything But the Truth.

"I don't see why the colonel didn't invite some of the ladies," Mrs. Harrigan complained.

"It's a man party. He's giving it to please himself. And I do not blame him. The women about here treat him abominably. They come at all times of the day and night, use his card room, order his servants about, drink his whisky and smoke his cigarettes, and generally invite themselves to luncheon and tea and dinner. And then, when they are ready to go back to their villas or hotel, take his motor-boat without a thank you. The colonel has about three thousand pounds outside his half-pay, and they are all crazy to marry him because his sister is a countess. As a bachelor he can live like a prince, but as a married man he would have to dig. He told me that if he had been born Adam, he'd have climbed over Eden's walls long before the Angel of the Flaming Sword paddled him out. Says he's always going to be a bachelor, unless I take pity on him," mischievously.

"Has he . . . ?" in horrified tones.

"About three times a visit," Nora admitted; "but I told him that I'd be a daughter, a cousin, or a niece to him, or even a grandchild. The latter presented too many complications, so we compromised on niece."

"I wish I knew when you were serious and when you were fooling."

"I am often as serious when I am fooling as I am foolish when I am serious . . ."

"Nora, you will have me shrieking in a minute!" despaired the mother. "Did the colonel really propose to you?"

"Only in fun."

Celeste laughed and threw her arm around the mother's waist, less ample than substantial. "Don't you care! Nora is being pursued by little devils and is venting her spite on us."

"There'll be too much Burgundy and tobacco, to say nothing of the awful stories."

"With the good old padre there? Hardly," said Nora.

Celeste was a French woman. "I confess that I like a good story that isn't vulgar. And none of them look like men who would stoop to vulgarity."

"That's about all you know of men," declared Mrs. Harrigan.

"I am willing to give them the benefit of a doubt."

"Celeste," cried Nora, gaily, "I've an idea. Supposing you and I run back after dinner and hide in the card room, which is right across from the dining room? Then we can judge for ourselves."

"Nora Harrigan!"

"Molly Harrigan!" mimicked the incorrigible. "Mother mine, you must learn to recognize a jest."

"Ah, but yours!"

"Fine!" cried Celeste.

As if to put a final period to the discussion, Nora began to hum audibly an aria from Aida.

They engaged a carriage in the village and were driven up to the villa. On the way Mrs. Harrigan discussed the stranger, Edward Courtlandt. What a fine looking young man he was, and how adventurous, how well-connected, how enormously rich, and what an excellent catch! She and Celeste—the one innocently and the other provocatively—continued the subject to the very doors of the villa. All the while Nora hummed softly.

"What do you think of him, Nora?" the mother inquired.

"Think of whom?"

"This Mr. Courtlandt."

"Oh, I didn't pay much attention to him," carelessly. But once alone with Celeste, she seized her by the arm, a little roughly. "Celeste, I love you better than any outsider I know. But if you ever discuss that man in my presence again, I shall cease to regard you even as an acquaintance. He has come here for the purpose of annoying me, though he promised the prefect in Paris never to annoy me again."

"The prefect!"

"Yes. The morning I left Versailles I met him in the private office of the prefect. He had powerful friends who aided him in establishing an alibi. I was only a woman, so I didn't count."

"Nora, if I have meddled in any way," proudly, "it has been because I love you, and I see you unhappy. You have nearly killed me with your sphinx-like actions. You have never asked me the result of my spying for you that night. Spying is not one of my usual vocations, but I did it gladly for you."

"You gave him my address?" coldly.

"I did not. I convinced him that I had come at the behest of Flora Desimone. He demanded her address, which I gave him. If ever there was a man in a fine rage, it was he as he left me to go there. If he found out where we lived, the Calabrian assisted him. I spoke to him rather plainly at tea. He said that he had had nothing whatever to do with the abduction, and I believe him. I am positive that he is not the kind of man to go that far and not proceed to the end. And now, will you please tell Carlos to bring my dinner to my room?"

The impulsive Irish heart was not to be resisted. Nora wanted to remain firm, but instead she swept Celeste into her arms. "Celeste, don't be angry! I am very, very unhappy."

If the Irish heart was impulsive, the French one was no less so. Celeste wanted to cry out that she was unhappy, too.

"Don't bother to dress! Just give your hair a pat or two. We'll all three dine on the balcony."

Celeste flew to her room. Nora went over to the casement window and stared at the darkening mountains. When she turned toward the dresser she was astonished to find two bouquets. One was an enormous bunch of violets. The other was of simple marguerites. She picked up the violets. There was a card without a name; but the phrase scribbled across the face of it was sufficient. She flung the violets far down into the grapevines below. The action was without anger, excited rather by a contemptuous indifference. As for the simple marguerites, she took them up gingerly. The arc these described through the air was even greater than that performed by the violets.

"I'm a silly fool, I suppose," she murmured, turning back into the room again.

It was ten o'clock when the colonel bade his guests good night as they tumbled out of his motor boat. They

were in more or less exuberant spirits, for the colonel knew how to do two things particularly well: order a dinner, and avoid the many traps set for him by scheming mammas and eligible widows. Abbott, the Barone and Harrigan, arm in arm, marched on ahead, whistling one tune in three different keys, while Courtlandt set the pace for the padre.

All through the dinner the padre had watched and listened. Faces were generally looks to him, and he read in this young man's face many things that pleased him. This was no night rover, a fool over wine and women, a spendthrift.

"There has been a grave mistake somewhere," he mused aloud, thoughtfully.

"I beg your pardon," said Courtlandt.

"I beg yours. I was thinking aloud. How long have you known the Harrigans?"

"The father and mother I never saw before today."

"Then you have met Miss Harrigan?"

"I have seen her on the stage."

"I have the happiness of being her confessor."

They proceeded quite as far as a hundred yards before Courtlandt volunteered: "That must be interesting."

"She is a good Catholic."

"Ah, yes; I recollect now."

"And you?"

"Oh, I haven't any religion such as requires my presence in churches. Don't misunderstand me! As a boy I was bred in the Episcopal church; but I have traveled so much that I have drifted out of the circle. I find that when I am out in the open, in the heart of some great waste, such as a desert, a sea, the top of a mountain, I can see the greatness of the Omnipotent far more clearly and humbly than within the walls of a cathedral."

"You believe in the tenets of Christianity?"

"Surely! A man must pin his faith and hope to something more stable than humanity."

"I should like to convert you to my way of thinking," simply.

"Nothing is impossible. Who knows?"

The padre, as they continued onward, offered many openings, but the young man at his side refused to be drawn into any confidence. So the padre gave up, for the futility of his efforts became irksome. His own lips were sealed, so he could not ask point blank the question that clamored at the tip of his tongue.

"So you are Miss Harrigan's confessor?"

"Does it strike you strangely?"

"Merely the coincidence."

"If I were not her confessor I should take the liberty of asking you some questions."

"It is quite possible that I should decline to answer them."

The padre shrugged. "It is patent to me that you will go about this affair in your own way. I wish you well."

"Thank you. As Miss Harrigan's confessor you doubtless know everything but the truth."

The padre laughed this time. The shops were closed. The open restaurants by the water front held but few idlers. The padre admired the young man's independence. Most men would have hesitated not a second to pour the tale into his ears in hope of material assistance. The padre's admiration was equally proportioned with respect.

"I leave you here," he said. "You will see me frequently at the villa."

"I certainly shall be there frequently. Good night."

Courtlandt quickened his pace which soon brought him alongside the others. They stopped in front of Abbott's pension, and he tried to persuade them to come up for a nightcap.

"Nothing to it, my boy," said Harrigan. "I need no nightcap on top of cognac 48 years old. For me that's a whole suit of pajamas."

"You come, Ted."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)